

## Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05

H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02

SS-15 HA-05 IO-13 MCT-02 /095 W

-----054548 252246Z /70

P R 241616Z JUL 78

FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1409

INFO AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE

AMEMBASSY COTONOU PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

USICA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIBREVILLE 2022

KINSHASA FOR RSO

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PEPR, GB, DM

SUBJECT: BENINESE EXPATRIATE COMMUNITY IN GABON

1. SUMMARY: BENINESE COMMUNITY RESIDENT GABON IS SUFFERING FOR REMARKS MADE BY PRESIDENT KEREKOU AT KHARTOUM ACCUSING GABON OF COMPLICITY IN JANUARY 1977 RAID ON COTONOU. FOLLOWING BONGO'S REPLY TO KEREKOU AT KHARTOUM AND PRIOR TO HIS RETURN TO LIBREVILLE, GABONESE GOVERNMENT AND PARTY POLITICAL BUREAU ISSUED THREATENING STATEMENT EVENING JULY 21 TO BENINESE RESIDENTS IN GABON. SHORTLY THEREAFTER CENTRAL MARKET AREA PRESUMED TO HOUSE BENINESE OPERATED SHOPS LOOTED AND BURNED WITH INDIVIDUAL BENINESE AND OTHER NON-GABONESE ATTACKED. UPON HIS RETURN GABON JULY 23, BONGO SAID HE WOULD HOLD MEETINGS NEXT DAY TO CONSIDER REPATRIATION OF BENINESE COMMUNITY BECAUSE HE UNABLE ASSURE CONTINUED  
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SECURITY. END SUMMARY.

2. GABON'S BENINESE COMMUNITY, ESTIMATED AT UP TO TWENTY THOUSAND, HAS BEEN HARRASSED AND TROUBLED SINCE PRESIDENT KEREKOU REPEATED ACCUSATIONS DURING OAU SUMMIT THAT BONGO AND GABON RESPONSIBLE FOR JANUARY 1977 RAID ON COTONOU. AGTER REPLYING TO KEREKOU, AN APPARENTLY ANGERED

BONGO DEPARTED OAU SUMMIT PRIOR ITS TERMINATION. WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT SORT OF MESSAGE HE SENT TO LIBREVILLE BUT GOVERNMENT AND GABONESE DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PDG) POLITICAL BUREAU MET IN SPECIAL SESSION EVENING OF JULY 21 AND AFTERWARD ISSUED THREATING STATEMENT TO GABON'S BENINESE COMMUNITY READ OVER RADIO AND TELEVISION AT 10:00PM. STATEMENT WAS READ IN RATHER MENACING TONE BY PDG INFORMATION CHIEF DR. MARCEL ELOI RAHANDI-CHAMBRIER AND WAS FILLED WITH EXAMPLES OF HOW BENINESE PROFITED FROM THEIR STAY IN GABON AND THE AMOUNTS OF MONEY REPATRIATED. IT CONTAINED STATEMENT THAT KEREKOU HAD BITTEN HAND THAT FED HIM AND IMPLIED GABONESE PEOPLE COULD NOT BE RESTRAINED IN SUCH PROVOCATION.

3. SHORTLY THEREAFTER GABONESE SECURITY FORCES BEGAN SECURITY CHECKS THROUGHOUT CITY PRESUMABLY TO APPREHAND BENINESE WITH IMPROPER DOCUMENTATION. GABONESE ZEALOTS, APPARENTLY INTERPRETING CHAMBRIER'S SPEECH AS INCITEMENT TO ATTACK BENINESE, BEGAN DOING JUST THAT. OTHER NON-GABONESE AFRICANS WERE ALSO VICTIMS OF ATTACKS ON PERSONS AND PROPERTIES. WE HAVE HEARD ESTIMATES OF FIVE TO EIGHT DEATHS WHICH WE CANNOT SUBSTANTIATE. JULY 24 NEWSPAPER REPORTS INJURIES BUT NO DEATHS. BENINESE OWNED SHOPS AROUND MOUNT BOUET MARKET HAD TORCH PUT TO THEM EARLY SATURDAY MORNING AND, ALTHOUGH FIRE DEPARTMENT RESPONDED ALL THAT IS REMAINING OF MAKE-SHIFT STANDS ARE TWISTED SHEETS OF TOOFING STEEL. ACCORDING TO OUR SOURCES, BENINESE SHOPOWNERS

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ANTICIPATED BEING BURNED OUT AND SOME FLED WITH THEIR GOODS DURING NIGHT. SATURDAY AND SUNDAY GROUPS OF BENIN CITIZENS GATHERED AT POLICE STATIONS AND OTHER IMPROVISED SAFE HavENS SEEKING PROTECTION. IN AT LEAST ONE INSTANCE, THEY HAVE FOUGHT BACK AND POLICE HAVE EMPLOYED TEAR GAS. MOST ATTACKS APPEAR TO BE BY GABONESE CIVILIANS BUT THERE ALSO REPORTS OF HARRASSMENT AND WORSE ON PART OF SECURITY FORCES. USICA EMPLOYEES OF BENIN NATIONALITY AND EMBASSY EMPLOYEES FROM CHAD AND CAE SUFFERED PHYSICAL ATTACKS AND WERE LOOTED.

4. INDICATIONS ARE THAT END RESULT MAY BE EVEN MORE DIFFICULT FOR BENINESE COMMUNITY. ALTHOUGH BONGO DISCLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR WHAT HAD TAKEN PLACE DURING HIS ABSENCE, HE DECLARED HIS SOLIDARITY WITH HIS PEOPLE AND STATED UPON HIS SUMDAY MORNING RETURN FROM KHARTOUM THAT HE WOULD BEGIN MEETINGS WITH GOVERNMENT AND PARTY TO REPATRIATE ALL BENINESE RESIDENTS IN GABON BECAUSE HE CANNOT "GUARANTEE THEIE SECURITY". GENUINE REFUGEES, HE PROMISED, WOULD BE EXEMPTED. THIS MIGHT BE DONEN HE SUGGESTED, BY PUTTING THEM ON AIR AFRIQUE FLIGHTS AND LETTING KEREKOU PAY FOR THEIR TICKETS. AND WHILE BONGO HAS KEPT HIS DISTANCE ON WHAT HAS TAKEN PLACE SO FAR, UPON COMPLETION OF HIS AIRPORT PRESS CONFERENCE, HE HAD BIG SMILE AND HUG FOR CHAMBRIER WITH

WHOM HE WALKED ARM IN ARM OUT OF AITPORT.

5. KEREKOU'S SPEECH AND GABONESE REACTION SUBJECT LENGTHY  
EDITORIAL READ OVER SUNDAY EVENING NEWSCAST. ATMOSPHERE AT LEAST  
IS PROPITIOUS FOR CONTINUED WIDESPREAD REPRISALS AGAINST  
BENINESE. UNLESS BONGO DECIDES TAKE HIGH ROAD AND PERMIT "REFUGEES  
OF REPRESSIVE BANKRUPT KEREKOU REGIME" REMAIN IN GABON OUT OF  
COMPASSION, LARGE NUMBERS OF BENINESE WILL APPARENTLY BE REPRIATED.  
EXPULSION COMMUNITY THAT PROVIDED SUBSTANTIAL PORTIONS SMALL  
COMMERCIAL SERVICES COULD ALSO CREATE DISLOCATIONS ESPECIALLY  
FOR AVERAGE GABONESE DEPENDENT UPON AFRICAN MARKETAM SITUATION WILL  
BOT BE CLEAR UNTIL AFTER TODAY'S GOVERNMENT AND PARTY MEETINGS.  
TIENKEN

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## Message Attributes

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